

**Ordinary People Unleashed**  
Acts 11:19-30  
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An ordinary Sunday School teacher named Ed was concerned for a young man in his class named Dwight, so he shared Christ with him in the back room of a shoe store. Dwight got saved and eventually became a well-known evangelist. Years later, when preaching in the British Isles, Dwight told the story of Ed who led each of the boys in his Sunday School class to Christ. This inspired a pastor named Fred to share Christ with everyone he met. Once, when Fred was preaching, a man named Wilbur got saved, who became one of the most effective evangelists of his time.

A retired baseball player named Billy learned from Wilbur and started holding crusades. A group of Christians wanted him to come to Charlotte, but he was unable to make it, so another evangelist named Mordecai took his place. The crowds were small, but one night, a tall, lanky 16-year-old went forward to give his life to Christ. His name was Billy. Billy Graham went on to communicate the gospel with more people than anyone else in history. And it all started with a Sunday School teacher.

You may have heard of Billy Graham, Billy Sunday and D.L. Moody, but you probably haven't heard much about Edward Kimball, Wilbur Chapman or Mordecai Hamm.

Turn in your Bibles to Acts 11:19-30. The main point of our message today is this: *God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people.*

Listen as I read.

*<sup>19</sup> Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. <sup>20</sup> But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup> The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, <sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and*

*of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. <sup>25</sup> So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.*

*<sup>27</sup> Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). <sup>29</sup> So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*

*God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people.*

- **The reason.** We see the reason for this explosion of evangelism in verse 21: *“And the hand of the Lord was with them...”* In the Bible, God’s hand refers to His power to bring judgment or blessing. Here, it refers to bringing the blessing of salvation. Isaiah 59:1: *“The arm of the Lord is not too short to save.”*
- **The results.** Because God’s hand was with them, we read of great results in verse 21: *“And a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”* In verse 24, *“a great many people were added to the Lord.”* In verse 26 a *“a great many people”* were taught.
- **The requirements.** While God did the work for His glory and the growth of His church, these believers also lived out some requirements. As I studied this text, I realized these ordinary believers were involved in the same four focus areas that Edgewood is committed to: gathering, growing, giving and going with the gospel, all for the glory of God. Let’s take them in the order they appear in the passage.

**1. Go with the gospel.** Look at verse 19: *“Now those who scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.”* Acts 8:4 puts this text into context: *“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”* As believers scattered, set aflame and energized by the mighty Spirit of God, they sowed the seed of the gospel. As they scattered, they shared Jesus only with those from a Jewish background. Perhaps they hadn’t heard how God used Peter to

reach the Roman soldier Cornelius and how God's grace poured out on Gentiles in Caesarea.

Phoenicia is the narrow strip of land located along the Mediterranean Sea. Two of its most famous cities are Tyre and Sidon. Some believers settled near the coast while others jumped on a ship and cruised west to the island of Cyprus.

Still others headed north until they came to Antioch, the capital of Syria, located 300 miles from Jerusalem. Antioch was the third largest city in the world and was an entertainment, commercial and multicultural center filled with Arabs, Asians, Jews, Romans and Gentiles. It was the only city in the ancient world to have lighted streets at night. Also, Antioch had a dark side as its pagan residents were known to live for possessions and pleasure. One writer said there was a perpetual festival of vice revolving around baths and brothels. The main attraction was the goddess Daphne who was worshipped in a park 10 miles in circumference populated by prostitutes.

Verse 20 tells us others began sharing the gospel with Hellenists, which refers to those who spoke Greek: ***“But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.”*** Would you notice we are not given their names? We know where they are from but not who they are. *God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people.* Cyrene is located in northern Africa, in the area now known as Libya.

Notice these unknown men ***“spoke,”*** which is the word for simple, ordinary conversations. It's also used in verse 19 where we see they were ***“speaking the word.”*** They were using street language to communicate salvation. They were simply living on mission, sharing naturally about Jesus in the course of everyday conversations.

These common Christians communicated Christ in their conversations. Their porches were their pulpits and their workplaces were their areas to witness. That's a good word for us. While there's a place for preaching as we see in verse 20, the vast majority of regular ordinary Christians simply spoke about the Savior. We can do the same, right?

I read a post this week called, “What's the Big Problem with our Evangelism?” by Steven Kneale. The link is up on Sermon Extras if you'd like to read it.

*In my experience, the issue tends to come down to fear of man. I think most of us are scared. I don't think it much of a coincidence that some of the people I have seen most effective in evangelism are those who evidently...do not care whether people think they are weird or strange...but most of us do worry about that sort of thing.*

*Let's be honest, to share the gospel with somebody you only need to know what the gospel is and have a mouth to speak it. We aren't failing to go because we don't have the resources, because we don't see the importance, nor because we don't have the time. It is fear that seems to make us reluctant.*

Verse 21 says ***“a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”*** One translation puts it like this: *“in their believing, they turned to the Lord.”* With so much easy-believism and cheap grace propagated from pulpits today, we must make sure we're proclaiming repentance which leads to eternal life. We must both trust in Christ *and* turn to Him as stated in 1 Thessalonians 1:9: ***“How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”***

Turning to something automatically means you are turning *from* something else. We're to turn from sin *and* turn to serve the Savior according to Acts 14:15: ***“You should turn from these vain things to a living God.”***

**2. Grow in God's grace.** Because so many pagans were converted, news traveled fast to the mother church in Jerusalem. They wanted to certify this outbreak of salvation, so in verse 22 they sent a trusted man named Barnabas: ***“The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.”*** Barnabas was a wise choice because he was a Greek speaking converted Jew from the island of Cyprus. He knew the culture well and they knew him.

Barnabas was also a good choice because he was a generous giver as we learned in Acts 4:37 when he sold property and gave the proceeds to the church. In addition, he had empathy for the underdog as demonstrated when he came alongside Saul and welcomed him into fellowship in Acts 9:26-28. We can apply at least two actions of Barnabas to our lives.

- **Be glad about grace.** I love the first response of Barnabas evident in verse 23: ***“When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad...”*** Grace always brings gladness. Actually, both words have the same root in Greek.

Grace means, “*acceptance and unmerited favor.*” I find it interesting that he “*saw the grace of God.*” How do you see grace?

You see it in changed lives. Jesus said in Matthew 7:20: “***Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.***” You see it when pagans turn to the Lord and start praising. You see it when someone who lived according to the flesh is now demonstrating the Fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:19-23: “***Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.***”

Barnabas never got over God’s grace in his own life. He had a radar to spot God’s grace in other people’s lives. He was even able to celebrate grace in an imperfect church. Don’t you love people who give grace? Barnabas practiced the teaching of Jude 22: “***Show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.***”

One pastor describes those who deal in the currency of grace: “*They have their heat sensors adjusted and alert for embers of grace that they can fan; while the other kind of people, it seems, have their buckets of criticism ready to pour on the ashes of imperfection.*”

Here’s a question. Is the gladness about God’s grace in your life motivating you to give grace to others?

- **Help others grow in grace.** After being glad about seeing God’s grace, the second thing Barnabas did was to help them grow in grace: “***...and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.***” The word “***exhort***” means, “*to encourage, to beseech, to come to the side of.*” It’s the idea of providing positive encouragement. To “***remain faithful***” means, “*adhering or cleaving to a set plan.*” Also he wanted them to have “***steadfast purpose,***” so they wouldn’t cave to the culture or shipwreck their faith when struggles come.

Grace led to gladness which led to growth. Barnabas saw potential, not problems. I talked to a new Christian recently who said, “*I’m a work in progress.*” I agreed with him and told him I was too.

Dante Bartiel Rossetti, the famous 19th-century poet and artist, was approached by an elderly man and asked to look at some sketches. Rossetti looked them over carefully and quickly concluded they were worthless.

The visitor was disappointed but seemed to expect Rossetti's judgment. Then he asked him to look at some paintings from a young art student. Rossetti immediately gushed over the talent they revealed and said, "*These are good. This young man, whoever he is, has great talent. He should be given every help and encouragement in his career as an artist. He has a great future, if he will work hard and stick with it.*"

"*Who is this fine young artist?*" he asked. The man said sadly, "*It is me—40 years ago. If only I had heard your praise then...for you see, I got discouraged and gave up—too soon.*"

Barnabas' nickname was "*the son of encouragement.*" He saw grace and celebrated grace. He gave grace and helped others grow in grace. Because of his attitude of affirmation, believers became faithful and focused. In our context, we must cling to the Lord in the midst of COVID, in our political polarization, and all the uncertainty in the world today.

Can people see evidence of God's grace in your life? Are you helping others grow in grace? To "encourage" means to put courage into someone. Is there anyone you can pour courage into, so they don't give up?

In verse 24, we get a picture of the character of Barnabas: "***For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.***" He was full of goodness, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. The word "***good***" means he was "*large-hearted and useful.*" He was a man of conviction and commitment. In short, he practiced what he preached.

He was committed to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. In summary, Barnabas was the real deal. He had a genuine faith. Because Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and was known as a good guy, "***a great many people were added to the Lord.***" The way you live can bring others to life.

When Barnabas realized he couldn't disciple these new disciples on his own, verse 25 reveals he put out an SOS to Saul: "***So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.***" As you may recall from Acts 9:30, the brothers had sent Saul to Tarsus many years earlier because of persecution. He probably arrived defeated,

disillusioned and discouraged. Barnabas had to do a thorough search for Saul because he was hard to find. Perhaps he had been kicked out of other towns or was busy evangelizing in remote areas.

Verse 26 tells us when he **“found him, he brought him to Antioch”** and together they **“taught a great many people.”** Barnabas left Antioch to find Saul so they could minister as a team, even though he hadn’t seen him in 10 years. Perhaps he knew Saul was a better teacher and he could provide significant training the church needed. This shows his humility because after Acts 13, when their names are used together, Saul/Paul is always listed first.

This week Pastor Tim and Pastor Kyle presented an intergenerational discipleship process to the staff and deacon teams. I was struck by their passion to *make* disciples and to *mature* disciples. We’re called not just to evangelism but also to discipleship. We must go with the gospel, but we must also help people grow. Matthew 28:19-20: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”** We’re to make disciples and mature them *by* baptizing them and teaching them to obey!

The Great Commission must become our mission. Here’s the definition of a disciple we’ve adopted: *“A disciple is a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.”* As we lovingly follow Jesus, we must intentionally help others follow Him.

**3. Gathering with God’s people.** Look again at verse 26: **“For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people...”** The word for **“met”** means, *“to gather together, to convene, to assemble.”* The Greek word for **“with”** is *“en,”* which means, *“in.”*

For a full year Barnabas and Saul gathered together with all God’s people in the church. No doubt there had to be a big space for them to meet in, showing that believers gathered in large groups and in smaller groups. It’s not an either/or but a both/and. We’re to gather in a large group *and* gather in small growth groups. That’s what the first church in Jerusalem did according to Acts 2:42: **“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes...”**

Look at the last part of verse 26: **“And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”** From this point on, Antioch became the focal point for gospel

proclamation and the place where missionaries were sent out from to go to the ends of the earth.

When God's people gathered together, others started to notice their nature, so they gave them a new name: "**Christians.**" Literally, this means, "*little Christs*" because they believed in and behaved like Christ. The suffix "*ian*" means, "*belonging to, coming from, being like something or someone.*"

The Bible gives us other names as well. Each one highlights a certain aspect of our identity – *believers* (those who exhibit saving faith), *brothers and sisters* (from the same womb), *Nazarenes* (Jesus was from Nazareth), *children of God* (those born again), *disciples* (learners and followers), *members of the way* (those who believe Jesus is the only way), *saints* (separated ones), *servants* (committed to obedience), *beloved* (personal affection), *friends* (intimacy with God), *fellow heirs* (everything Jesus owns is ours). The term I've been using recently is "*follower of Christ*" because it speaks of us going somewhere and following someone.

Initially, "**Christian**" was a term of derision used to mock followers of Christ. It would be equivalent to someone calling you a "Jesus Freak" today. BTW, I just heard the DC Talk book called "Jesus Freaks," which highlights ancient and modern martyrs, has been revised and updated in conjunction with Voice of the Martyrs. If you're looking to grow in your understanding of how Christians are being persecuted, I highly recommend it. A link is posted on Sermon Extras. We'll be highlighting the plight of persecuted Christians next weekend.

Again, the name "Christian" has fallen into disrepute, especially because so many claim to be Christians without being committed to Christ. A couple weeks ago I was having lunch with a friend and an older woman seated near us was having some difficulty getting up from the table. I asked if she needed help. She declined and said the Lord must not be done with her yet. Twice she said when you get to be her age you thank God for every day you get. I agreed and told her God has plans and purposes for her. Then I asked if she was a Christ follower to which she abruptly said, "*No, I'm not.*" She had used the Lord's name at least three times but had not aligned herself to Him. We were sad as she walked away.

If you're a Christian, wear the name well because it was given to the finest. If you claim the name of Christ, then believe and behave accordingly.

The church at Antioch was committed to going with the gospel, they were growing in grace and they gathered with God's people. Also, they gave what God had given to them.

**4. Give what God has given.** Listen to verses 27-28: *“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).”*

According to Ephesians 4:11, apostles and prophets helped lay the foundation of the church, but since we now have the complete Word of God, these offices are no longer functioning. The historian Josephus mentioned this famine when he wrote, *“Many died for lack of food.”*

When these Christians heard about the famine, they unleashed their finances in verse 29: *“So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.”* The word *“determined”* means they *“resolved by marking out definitely.”* We get our word *“horizon”* from the Greek word. It has the idea of looking to the horizon in order to mark out the boundaries of their giving. They looked at the far limits of what the Lord would allow them to give financially.

It's striking to me *“everyone”* participated, but not everyone gave the same amount. Each gave according to *“his ability,”* as God had prospered them, according to their potential. No one gave everything but everyone gave something.

Notice again no names were given here. *God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people.*

It's been said we have too many “tippers” in our churches and not enough “tithers.” While tithing (giving 10%) is a good place to start, the Bible also speaks of proportional giving, meaning the more God prospers us, the more we give. Here are just two passages, one from the OT and one from the NT.

- Deuteronomy 16:16-17: *“They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.”*
- 2 Corinthians 8:3-4: *“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”*

Don't miss the fact these Greek speaking Christians from Antioch spontaneously sent this money to Christians who had a Jewish background in Jerusalem! Actually, verse 30 tells us they sent money and they sent men. It shows when part of the body is hurting, we should do all we can to help.

Edgewood has exhibited this kind of extravagant generosity from the very beginning. In 1905, over 40 charter members of Edgewood came together *"...to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expense of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations."*

As the people of Edgewood, we have always looked to the "far limits" of giving to see how generous God wants us to be. You have demonstrated this over and over again! In the midst of COVID, with only about half of our people back to gathering in person, you gave over \$3,000 to Pregnancy Resource's Baby Bottle Project! We ordered 500 Operation Christmas Child boxes, thinking we would have a lot left over. Sheila tells me we have less than 25 left!

So many of you have given towards Grow Time, which allowed us to expand and renovate our facility. Your giving has enabled us to gather again. Here's what I celebrate...

1. New technology has allowed us to broadcast on Cozi TV and to Livestream our services on our website and Facebook.
2. The larger platform allows for distancing musicians and for child dedications.
3. Our renovated Worship Center now seats 620, which allows us to safely seat people during the pandemic.
4. Our new south lot and volleyball area has been used for Mainspring, the Women's Bonfire, and Trunk or Treat.
5. Our expanded children's area has allowed us to relaunch nursery and EdgeKids during the 9:00am service.
6. We now have space for our growing Student Ministry – we're averaging over 50 (larger than pre-Covid).
7. We have additional space for our adult Growth Groups.

Thanks to those of you who have decided to continue your Grow Time giving so we can pay down our mortgage. Because of your faithful generosity to our general

budget, and because we've had fewer expenses during COVID, in the last two months we were able to pay an extra \$60,000 toward the principal on our loan!

### Action Steps

*God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people.* For our application today, think of one specific step you can take in each of our four Gs.

- **Gather:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Grow:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Give:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Go:** \_\_\_\_\_

After you've done that, what's one thing you learned today you can share with someone else?

This weekend we mark the Reformation by celebrating the 5 Solas: *Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, all to the Glory of God Alone.*

During the Reformation, there were lesser known individuals who believed leaders like Luther, Calvin and Zwingli didn't go far enough in purifying the church. They started the "Radical Reformation," out of which some believe Baptists have their roots. One article from Dallas Seminary put it like this:

*"Often overlooked, even forgotten, for a variety of reasons, the numbers of their followers were, and still are, much smaller than the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican communities. Seen as dangerous by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant reformers because of their rejection of infant baptism and their support of the separation of church and state, many of them were martyred."*

To me, that's simply more evidence that *God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people.* These radical reformers didn't realize they were doing extraordinary things. They were simply being bold and obedient. And that's what God calls ordinary people to do today.

### Communion

Jesus gave us communion to help us remember His extraordinary obedience when He went to the cross. He longs for us to experience the "radical reformation" that

only He can give. Let's take this time now to remember and to recalibrate as we allow Him to radically reform our lives.

Jewish people celebrated the Passover every year as a reminder of God's redemption. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He gathered his disciples together for a meal – the Passover meal. This supper was rich in symbolism and was designed to trigger memories of God's past faithfulness...but Jesus was about to instill new meaning into the meal.

Luke 22:19-20 – *“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”*

Did you catch the language of substitutionary sacrifice? *“This is my body, which is given **FOR YOU**...This cup that is poured out **FOR YOU** is the new covenant in my blood.”*

The Savior died in your place, as your substitute. That means He died for you...and...instead of you...

*Because of grace, He died in your place!*

The bread and the cup remind us that the Lamb of God sacrificed Himself for sinners, fully satisfying God's justice. He poured out His life so our sins can be pardoned.

Before we receive communion it's important to reflect and take a spiritual inventory. 1 Corinthians 11:28 says, *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

- Consider your relationship with God
- Confess any sins that God brings to mind

### **Directions for Opening Cup**

1. Hold the cup with one hand and with the other find the clear tab and pull gently to open in order to take the bread → Take bread

2. Continue to hold the cup and now find the other tab and pull carefully to open the juice cup. Be careful while pulling – you don't have to pull it completely off → Take juice